

By Daniel Van Oudenaren

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In the US House of Representatives, three members on Tuesday morning joined two members of **the US Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF)** at an “emergency press conference,” as it was described by Rep. Chris Smith of New Jersey. The event marked the first public criticism of the Sudan policy from Rep. Frank Wolf, a legislator with long-standing involvement with the issue.

USCIRF Commission Chairman Leonard A. Leo, having recently returned from a five day visit to Khartoum, said “it is time for the United States to exercise strength. The policy of engagement – ‘cookies and gold stars’ – is not working. It is emboldening Khartoum to a point where this peace process is perilously close to failure.”

The sudden renewed furor over Sudan comes after recent crackdowns on demonstrators in Khartoum who were led in part by politicians of the Sudan People’s Liberation Movement. The latter party, a signatory to the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA), objects to major gaps in implementation of the 2005 deal, whose terms are set to expire in January 2011.